



Advice for parents and carers

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is committed to stopping bullying in all its forms. In November each year, ABA runs Anti-Bullying Week – a high profile campaign to shine a light on the issue of bullying, the damage it can do to our children and young people, and what we can do about it.

Bullying will only stop if we take action together. We know that the majority of children, parents, schools and community organisations do want to take action to tackle bullying but sometimes it can be hard to know what to do, who can help and what strategies really work.

There is no easy answer when it comes to bullying behaviour – every situation is different and requires a different approach. So, how can parents and carers recognise the signs that may tell them if child or young person is either being bullied or bullying – what might they be doing, saying or feeling.

What is bullying

Bullying is when one person or a group deliberately hurts another individual or group. This is usually more than a one-off incident and can be both physical and psychological.

Most bullying is based on real or perceived differences – in appearance, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or being in care or a carer – children having a physical disability or special educational needs may be particularly vulnerable to bullying for a range of reasons related to their specific needs. Some people think it is okay to bully because it happened to them and they think it is part of growing up.

What do we mean by bullying behaviour ?

Bullying can take many forms – physical, verbal, psychological. It includes behaviour such as:

- name calling
- spreading hurtful stories
- excluding someone from groups and breaking up friendships
- making demeaning comments about gender, culture, religion or sexuality
- making demeaning comments about a disability or illness
- taking possessions or money
- hitting, pushing or kicking.

Is cyberbullying different?

Cyberbullying has the same effect as verbal or psychological bullying but it takes place via mobile phones, emails or texting. The behaviour can be carried out by an individual or a group and could include: sending hurtful texts; spreading rumours through social networking sites; uploading private or distorted images or film; sending abusive comments through gaming sites; and assuming a false identity to cause harm or mischief.

What signs should parents and carers look out for?

Children and young people who are being bullied may feel isolated and frightened, weak and powerless to make things better, and that it may be their fault. Many children who are experiencing bullying do not tell anyone.

So what are the signs to look for that might indicate that bullying is happening? Remember that any of these signs may have other causes – so quiet, calm discussion and really good listening is vital for understanding what is really happening.

A young person who is being bullied may say:

- friends are not talking to them
- they need to be driven to or from school
- they need more money
- they have lost their appetite
- they have lost their dinner money
- they hate going to that lesson / going on that bus journey / lessons with those pupils.

A young person who is being bullied may also:

- show signs of illness or pretend to be ill, for example with headaches or stomachaches
- skip lessons at school
- avoid attending particular places
- do less well in schoolwork or homework, or lack concentration



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- have their possessions damaged or stolen
- blank out others – withdrawing from relationships with friends or family
- become less ‘chatty’ – and be more clingy or aggressive
- avoid taking phone calls, using their mobile phone or the internet
- show signs of a serious condition – such as anxiety, depression or even self-harm
- arrive home with unexplained bruises or cuts
- change their journey routes or times – especially after school
- change their friendship groups
- behave differently towards family or friends
- show changed sleep patterns, signs of disturbance or bed-wetting.

What can you do to help?

If you think your child is being bullied, don’t panic – try to keep an open mind: Your key role is listening, calming and providing reassurance that the situation can get better when action is taken. Provide a quiet, calm place where they can talk about what is happening.

Listen and reassure them that coming to you was the right thing to do: It may not be easy for a child to talk about being bullied so it is important to try to find out how they are feeling, what has happened, when and where. Though at this stage it is not so much about establishing a set of facts as encouraging talking and listening.

Assure them that the bullying is not their fault and that you are there to support them: remind them that they can also have the support of family and friends.

Find out what the child or young person wants to happen: help them to identify the choices available to them and the potential next steps to take; and the skills they may have to help solve the problems.

Discuss the situation with your child’s school: the law requires all schools to have a behaviour policy which sets out the measures that will be taken to encourage good behavior and respect for others and to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.

Think before you act: adults need to recognise the emotions they feel about this situation. You may feel anger, hurt, guilt, helplessness or fear. Your own memories of being a child may help you empathise and find solutions – or get in the way. You may feel pressure to take action, sometimes any action, but this may be unhelpful if you do not have a clear and full view of the facts – or of what your child wants.

My dad was all for going round and seeing Mr xxx about his son bullying my sister but I knew that would make it worse – he would just get angry and then it would all come back on me.

What not to do

Young people have asked us to make sure parents and carers are made aware of the things that won’t help

- Don’t let your anger or fear get in the way of an open discussion.
- Don’t disbelieve or mistrust what you are hearing.
- Don’t make the young person think it is their fault.
- Don’t say that bullying has to be lived through as it is ‘part of growing up’ and they just have to put up with it.
- Don’t give a sense that nothing can be done to make things improve.
- Don’t take action before you really know what is going on.
- Don’t pressurise or threaten anyone.

When you need to do more

Sometimes bullying is so serious that other steps need to be taken. You can seek advice on-line or over the phone – see helplines below or check your local authority services directory. Agencies that may need to get involved in more serious cases include:

- Children’s services in your local authority – if there are child protection or safeguarding issues
- CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection services) – if illegal on-line activity is taking place
- The police – if there may be criminal or anti-social behaviour taking place, such as harassment or hate crime.

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Here are some specific things you can say to a young person facing bullying

- Be calm.
- Do not do or say anything aggressively.
- Keep a note or a diary of what is happening.
- Be confident – you have done nothing to deserve this.
- Be assertive.
- You could say ‘This is not funny. This is bullying. This is wrong.’
- Friends are there, ready to help.
- Think who can help you – young people or adults.
- Seek help.
- Say to someone ‘Please would you watch what is happening here’ and ask them to help you report the incident.
- Report the incident to an adult.

What if a young person is bullying someone else?

It can be difficult to believe that a young person is bullying someone, but such behaviour must be challenged. The kind of behaviour you might notice includes:

- having more money or ‘presents’ from another child
- doing less well at school, sports or clubs
- expecting ‘respect’ from others
- coming home later from school
- persistently changing mobile or website use
- being more secretive
- making racist, sexist or homophobic remarks
- questioning someone’s sexuality or gender identity
- using violent or aggressive language
- using phrases like – ‘we hate their sort’, ‘serves them right’, ‘it was only a joke’.

What can I do?

Sometimes bullying is a reaction to a particular or temporary event in a child’s life, such as bereavement or family separation. The following actions may help.

- Get them to talk about their emotions and about the feelings of the person they are bullying.
- Identify any underlying causes of the behaviour.

- Discuss it with you child’s school.
- Challenge any excuses given for the bullying behaviour.
- Stress they are responsible for their own actions.
- Assure them of your support to help sort out the problem.
- Consider whether another child or adult might be driving the bullying behaviour.

Where can a young person get more information and help?

A child or young person needs the support of those adults closest to them and that of other adults who have a relationship of trust or authority with them.

They may also find it helpful to talk to another young person they can trust.

Some national sources of support

ChildLine

ChildLine is the UK’s free, confidential helpline for children and young people. Trained volunteers are on hand to provide advice and support, by phone and online, 24 hours a day. Call ChildLine on 0800 1111 or visit www.childline.org.uk

CyberMentors

CyberMentors is a safe social networking site providing information and support for young people affected by bullying. Young people aged 11–25 are trained as CyberMentors in schools and online, so that they can offer support and advice to other young people. CyberMentors are also supported by trained counsellors, who are available online if needed. For more information and free CyberMentors resources for teachers visit www.cybermentors.org.uk

Where can adults get help to support a young person?

All schools should take action to prevent bullying. There may be local authority support, too.

Some national sources of support

Kidscape

Kidscape works UK-wide to provide individuals and organisations with the practical skills and resources necessary to keep children safe from harm. It runs assertiveness training courses for children and young people under the age of 16, their parents or carers, and those who work with them. Kidscape operates a telephone helpline for the parents and carers of bullied children. Call 08451 205204 or visit www.kidscape.org.uk

Parentline Plus

Parentline Plus is a national charity that works for, and with, parents. Its Be Someone to Tell website (see address below) offers advice on dealing with bullying in all its forms. You can also get support and advice from the Parentline helpline on 0808 800 2222 or email them at parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk for a free personalised response in three working days. www.besomeonetotell.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education

www.ace-ed.org.uk

Advice for parents and children on all school matters
Tel 0808 800 5793

Children's Legal Centre

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people
Tel 01206 873820

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